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Ipsative assessment: comparison with past performance

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Summary

Defines ipsative assessment and its potential benefits

Builds on findings of research on ipsative feedback for distance learners funded by CDE



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Ipsative assessment as an alternative to criteria-referenced assessment

Personal best



What is ipsative assessment ?

An ipsative assessment compares current performance with a previous performance.

Ipsative feedback on progress

Ipsative grades awarded for progress

Self-referential assessment not necessarily a self-assessment

Hughes, G. 2011. Aiming for Personal Best: a Case for Introducing Ipsative Assessment in Higher Education *Studies in Higher Education* 36 (3): 353 - 367

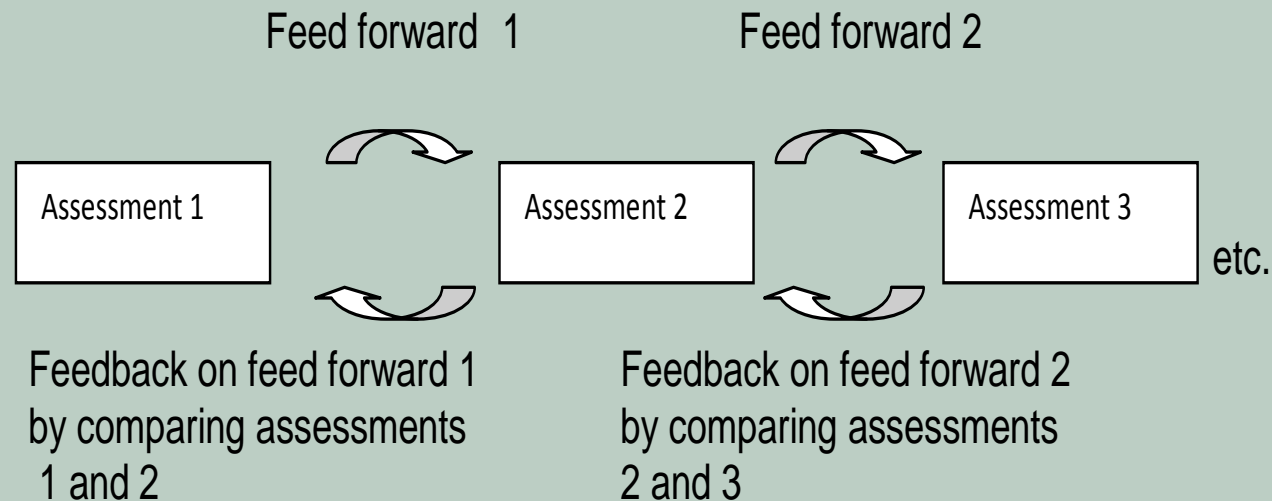
Possible benefits of ipsative assessment

- Improves self-esteem and confidence by rewarding progress (particularly for those who do not achieve high grades)
- It might motivate learners to act on feedback
- Gives tutor and students a longitudinal view of assessment

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- 1. Phase 1 of study in 2009-2010 showed that ipsative feedback was rare**
- 2. However, both students and tutors felt that ipsative feedback would be beneficial**
- 3. Ipsative grades were perceived to be problematic and so not developed for the next phase of the study-focus on ipsative feedback.**

Ipsative cumulative scheme for 3 sequential assessments



Excerpt from the new form

Please indicate what feedback you were given, for your last assignment, in terms of how you could improve:

Please indicate what feedback you were given for your draft of this assignment, in terms of how you could improve (if applicable):

Please comment on the extent to which you feel you have responded to feedback:

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- 1. Students submit a draft pieces of work for feedback**
- 2. Students fill in a new Assignment Submission form when they submit their work for assessment identifying actions arising from previous feedback (self assessment)**
- 3. Students received ipsative feedback from tutors on how well they have addressed the feedback (self-referential assessment)**
- 4. Students' previous assignments and feedback were made available in the VLE for consultation.**

Evaluation methods

- **The written feedback given to 28 students was analysed**
- **13 students were interviewed about the usefulness of feedback including the ipsative feedback**
- **The 3 main tutors were interviewed about the new approach to giving feedback (2 others were part-time and declined to be interviewed)**

Excerpt from the new form

Please indicate what feedback you were given, for your draft of this assignment, in terms of how you could improve (if applicable): - **Methodology: clearer statement on exact nature of research**
- **To identify and use a clearer narrative thread (student 22)**

Please comment on the extent to which you feel you have responded to feedback: - **In the methodology section I have added more detail and have given further thought to sampling and validity of data**
- **tried to use more signposts to direct the reader through the narrative more clearly (student 22)**

Analysis of use of the form and written feedback

- **Not all students used the form – some were unable to access it**
- **Some who filled in the form were at the box-ticking end of the spectrum e.g.**

I have tried to act on all the feedback received (student 11)

Ipsative Feedback to students from tutors

‘It is clear that you took careful note of the advice you received on the draft and the previous assignment. You have worked hard to improve the narrative flow and have taken steps to develop your critical engagement with the sources.’ (Tutor A)

‘It is a pity you did not have the chance to revise your assignment on the basis of the feedback provided earlier, as this would probably result in a better grade.’ (Tutor C)

Analysis of use of the form and written feedback

- **Some tutors used the form to provide ipsative feedback**
- **One tutor gave ipsative feedback when students did not use the form**
- **The form is not essential for comparing with previous performances as some tutors appeared to have used the records in the VLE to look back to previous comments they had written.**

Reaction to the new approach to feedback – the students

- **The form helped students to reflect on how and to what extent they had responded to tutor's comments**
'It [the form] allowed me to show how I had attempted to improve on my last assignment and also encouraged me to reflect more deeply on my submission.' (Student 22)
- **Contributing to motivation and confidence building**
'[the comment] gave me confidence and made me feel proud of my work It also made me aware of the changes that I made that improved my work so I will know what to do next time.' (Student 16)

Reaction to the new approach to feedback – the students

‘My tutor gave particularly good feedback after my draft assignment. It was easy to understand and follow and was very specific so I could see exactly what I needed to improve and how. I think her feedback made a big difference to my final mark.’ (Student 16)

‘...the tutor reminded me of not having addressed an issue raised about my first draft. I did email the tutor and highlighted an extract from the final essay where I had covered the suggestion made. I believe the tutor had missed that point and the comment was then removed from my final feedback. I was told, however, that this would not result in a revised mark.’ (Student 13)

Reaction to the new approach to feedback – the tutors

- The form helped tutors write feedback

‘I was already on the journey to that approach. When providing feedback I tended to approach it in my normal way and then made sure that I adapted things to meet the requirements of the new front sheet.’ (Tutor A)

- Concern about raising expectations

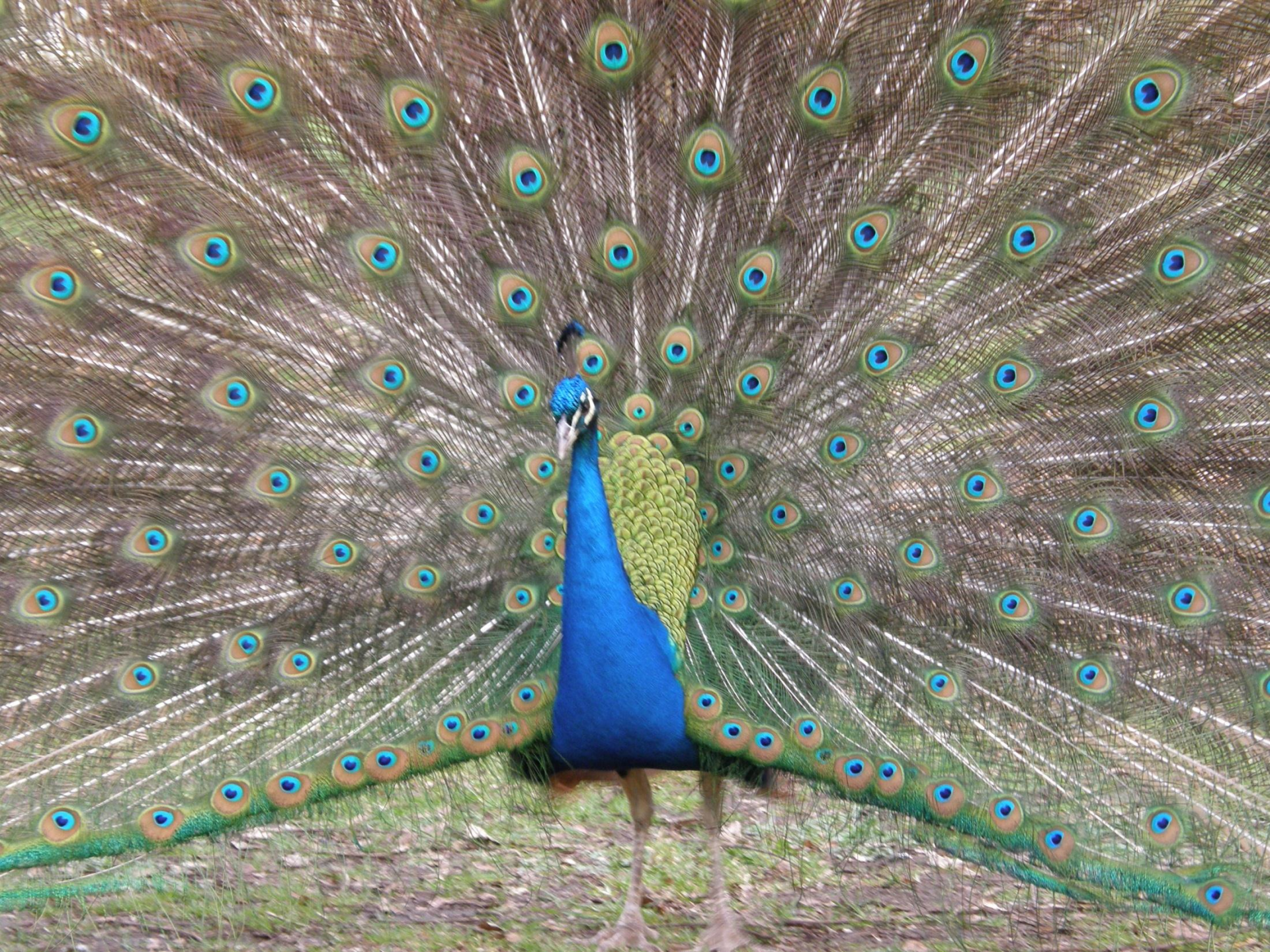
‘I could see from the comments that some students expected their revised draft to lead to an A (grade), and it was subsequently disappointing for these students to gain a sense of progress without an A.’ (Tutor C)

The benefits of ipsative feedback

- **The form helped some students reflect on feedback**
- **A structured approach such as including a submission form might help both students and tutors take a longer-term view of assessment**
- **Ipsative feedback can be motivational for distance learners**

The challenges for implementing ipsative feedback

- **Ipsative feedback is new and needs time to be accepted**
- **Students may expect instant higher grades**
- **Scaling up needs the practice to be embedded across a programme and tutors may need development time**



References

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